

*This chapter is dedicated
to my parents, Loren and
Nancy Johnson.*



The physical, personal and social positives of exercise far outweigh the negatives. Yet, so many people choose not to exercise on a regular basis. Why? Why is it that some people find it easy to make changes in their lifestyles, others find it more difficult and some find it nearly impossible? This chapter will briefly explore these differences and provide you with tools to track your progress as well as strategies for sticking to your plan so that you experience success and get fit!

SELF EXPLORATION

Before you can learn the truths about how to get fit, you must first learn some truths about yourself. To do that, you'll need to monitor three different aspects of your life for one to two weeks: your nutritional habits, your exercise regimen and your feelings about those two activities. If you're trying to lose body fat, for instance, think about how you feel when you pull out a tub of ice cream from the refrigerator at 9:00 in the evening. Are you tired, happy, sad, frustrated or just plain hungry? In this example, the key is to understand what made you eat. By monitoring these three aspects of your life, you'll be able to track your daily habits and find patterns that you'd like to keep and/or modify.

A breakdown of the three components will be discussed along with a description of what's meant by each. In addition, a course of action is provided to help you examine the components on your own. In the upcoming illustrations, weight (fat) loss is used as the primary goal. If you have an alternative goal – such as adding muscle mass or training for an athletic event – you can easily modify the three components to achieve your intended goal.

It'll be helpful for you to maintain some type of record or diary of these components. In doing so, be very specific and provide as much detail as possible. Take a few minutes to think about each of the following areas:

Your Eating Habits

Recording specifics about what you eat will help you to assess the types of decisions that you make when it comes to food. You can note the number of calories that you consume, the number of servings that you get from fruits and vegetables, the time of day that you eat snacks and so on.

Your Exercise Regimen

By documenting your physical activities, you can keep track of your performance to monitor your progress and make your workouts more meaningful. For strength training, you should include the exercises that

Chapter 11

Setting Goals: Small Steps, Big Improvements

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you do, the resistance that you use and the number of repetitions that you perform; for aerobic training, you should include the type of activity, the duration of the activity, the level of intensity or effort (that is, your exercising heart rate) and, if applicable, the distance that you complete.

Your Feelings Related to Activities

It's easy to record what you do when eating and exercising; it's more difficult to record what you feel when eating and exercising. In other words, you'd document if you exercised because you were motivated (and, if so, by what); if you didn't exercise because you were tired; if you ate because you were upset; and so on. It isn't necessary to record every feeling that you experience during the day – only record those that directly affect your behavior. For example, perhaps you consumed half of a pizza because you had an argument with your supervisor. Identifying what makes you eat food and what makes you skip exercise is the foundation for you to understand how to change your lifestyle. As a result, don't skip this all-important step. Spend some time on it and, in the long run, you'll reap the benefits!

While recording your feelings, you may notice a pattern with a particular person, place, situation or event. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), many people relate environmental cues to

undesired eating. For instance, maybe you're more likely to overeat while watching television, whenever treats are on display or when you're frustrated with a coworker. Once you make the association between eating and a certain cue – such as watching television – try to avoid or eliminate the cue or forge a new association. In this case, you might pedal a stationary bicycle while you watch television. Over time, you'll lose the desire to connect the two behaviors together (such as watching television and overeating).

SETTING GOALS

An extremely important step is to set goals. Research shows that setting goals helps people in both the short and long run. In one study, for example, researchers told one group of subjects to do 100 sit-ups and another group to simply “do your best.” The group that was given a specific goal – do 100 sit-ups – had significantly greater success than the group that wasn't given a specific goal.

When determining your goals, the first thing is to make certain that you set the right goals. Maybe heart disease runs in your family and you want to prevent the disease from affecting you; maybe you want to lose five pounds; maybe you want to walk three miles. Whatever the rationale, your goals

should be in line with what you want to attain. Therefore, if you want to prevent heart disease and know that obesity is correlated to heart disease, then one of your goals should be to lose body fat.

Next, you'll need to determine short- and long-term goals. According to the NIH, effective goals should be specific, attainable and forgiving (meaning that we're all less than perfect!) As an example, compare walking five miles four times a week to working out four times a week. Walking five miles four times a week is specific and measurable; working out four times a week is extremely vague. Also when making your goals, start out with small goals and work toward large ones. Think about it this way: Health and wellness is a marathon, not a sprint. Keep in mind that you can always add onto your goals. Additionally, it's more difficult and less satisfying to take away from your goals. To reiterate, make certain that your goals are specific, attainable and forgiving. Remember, no one's perfect.

Short-Term Goals

(30 days to three months)

Short-term goals are steppingstones on the way to meeting long-term goals. Nevertheless, short-term goals serve another purpose as well. A short-term goal will give

you a concrete and specific set of tasks to accomplish in the immediate future. This is imperative as it's far easier to motivate yourself when your goal is almost within reach rather than years away. Once you set your short-term goals, you'll always have the momentum to remain successful.

Long-Term Goals

(more than three months)

Once again, be specific. You should write down your long-term goals such as the measurements that you want to have (such as your chest, arms, waist, thighs, calves and clothing size); the distance that you want to run or walk; the weight that you want to lose; and so on. Be realistic but don't limit yourself to what you think you can achieve. Write down what you want!

Goal Achievement Questions

The United States Department of Health and Human Services offers three questions to consider after the completion of every goal. Whether it's a short- or long-term goal, take the time to ask yourself these questions:

- **Was I successful in accomplishing my goal?**
- **If not, what got in the way and how can I overcome those obstacles? (Perhaps I need a more realistic goal.)**
- **If I was successful in accomplishing my**





goal, how can I build on that success and set a new, slightly higher goal?

Write Down Everything!

It's easy to set short- and long-term goals; however, it's even easier to forget what they are. There are three different pieces of information that you need to write down in a notebook: (1) your goals, both short and long term; (2) your activities; and (3) specifics about your nutrition. Whatever your goals, a log will help you to obtain better results. At the end of each week, you can look back and perhaps ask yourself, "I did that?" By writing down these goals, you'll not only remember them but you'll also keep yourself honest and motivated and accomplish more.

TAKE ACTION

Now you should be ready to take action. First, you need a clear-cut plan on how to track your progress and reach your goals. When planning, make a schedule for the

week so that time isn't an issue later. If you're like most people, your schedule is packed every day. The truth is that it's difficult to get fit and stay that way, especially when people's entire lives are built around driving cars, eating on the road and spending free time relaxing in front of a television or computer. So keep it simple and integrate better eating and activity habits into your life, one thing at a time. Soon enough, those small changes will add up to big results.

Take a moment now – if you haven't already – to make a plan for the upcoming week. Remember to keep it simple. Next week, you can always add a day of exercise or reduce some calories from your diet. Many of you may be thinking, "Wait, this is it? It's this easy to change my daily habits that I've been doing all of my life?" For the most part, yes, that's it. Below are seven additional suggestions on how to maintain your plan and goals:

- 1. Keep educated on the benefits of improved health and fitness.** The better you understand what losing weight and eating healthy will do for your body, the more you'll comprehend how your daily decisions affect your health and fitness.
- 2. Remember that small steps equal big improvements.** Keep your short-term goals simple and attainable. Exercising for 10 minutes a day is better than nothing.

By documenting your physical activities, you can keep track of your performance to monitor your progress and make your workouts more meaningful.

3. **Try a new class/sport/exercise.** If you keep exercise interesting, then you're more likely to stick to it. As they say, variety is the spice of life. So, keep it fun and interesting.
4. **Train with a friend.** A training partner can push you to new heights and also help you to keep your workout appointments (and vice versa).
5. **Make sure that if you stray from a healthy lifestyle, you return to implementing good habits as soon as possible.** The longer you wait, the more difficult it is to do so.
6. **Hire a personal trainer.** If you know that you're paying extra for the services of a personal trainer, you may be more likely to show up at a fitness facility.
7. **Make yourself accountable.** Tell your friends and family about your new goals so that they can keep you on the right track, especially if you take a slight detour.

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

Despite all of the amazing benefits of eating right and exercising regularly, many people still choose an unhealthy lifestyle.

Researchers have determined that there are

four main reasons why some individuals may not initiate healthy lifestyle changes:

1. **Lack of time.** Time is a major issue for many people. If they were to look more closely at their daily schedules, however, they'd discover that a lack of time is more perception than reality.
2. **Lack of knowledge about fitness/nutrition.** Many people don't have the knowledge of where to begin. They wonder about things such as the length of a workout, the exercises that should be done and the proper level of intensity. In addition, they wonder about portion sizes and the types of food to consume. (These and other questions are answered thoroughly throughout this book.)
3. **Lack of facilities.** It's important to realize that you don't need access to a fitness facility with fancy exercise bicycles or treadmills, a swimming pool and other amenities to get fit. Really all that's needed is a pair of comfortable shoes.
4. **Lack of energy.** Many people maintain such busy schedules that fatigue is often an excuse for not exercising or choosing healthy foods. Studies have shown that fatigue is typically more mental than physical and is often related to stress.

Goal Achievement Questions:

- Was I successful in accomplishing my goal?
- If not, what got in the way and how can I overcome those obstacles? (Perhaps I need a more realistic goal.)
- If I was successful in accomplishing my goal, how can I build on that success and set a new, slightly higher goal?



Make note of these additional challenges, as you'll undoubtedly encounter them along your quest to attain your goals. When you come upon these barriers, return to this chapter and glance over the tools and suggestions that are provided. This will help you to get back on track.

Even if you're committed to exercise, you'll probably have moments when your best intentions are stifled by excuses not to work out. Stay positive in your actions and attitudes. Lastly, use minor setbacks as learning opportunities. And remember, small steps lead to big improvements.

*When you exercise,
your body produces
endorphins that
will give you a
psychological boost.*

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